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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000523

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BAHRAINI LEADERS ON IRAQ: FOCUS FIRST ON SECURITY, LATER ON DEMOCRACY

Classified By: Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The King, Crown Prince and Foreign Minister told visiting American officials on April 13 that the U.S. needs to focus more of its effort on restoring stability in Iraq immediately, and to worry less about building democracy there in any short time frame. The King and Foreign Minister suggested Arab states should help with security issues in consultation with the U.S. End Summary.

12. (C) Bahrain's King, Crown Prince and Foreign Minister told visiting U.S. officials that the U.S. needs to concentrate its attention now on restoring stability in Iraq, and worry less about building democracy there. King Hamed told CJCS General Myers on April 13 that the U.S. can't leave Iraq until stability and order are securely reestablished. He dismissed the Iraqi Governing Council as unable to make tough decisions. Iraq needs to be a republic, but Arab republics historically are weak, he said. Therefore, the U.S. Government needs to find a strong leader able to steer the republic and guide the security services. It is vital, the King asserted, that a strong leader rebuild the Iraqi Government's authority and credibility among the Iraqi public. The King stated that it didn't matter if that strong man was a Sunni, a Shia or a Kurd; even Salahadin was a Kurd, he exclaimed.

13. (C) Crown Prince Salman was characteristically blunt to CJCS Myers at the April 13 lunch also attended by the King. Salman asked when the U.S. would shift its focus from building democracy in Iraq - a nearly impossible task in the short term - and instead concentrate on building security. He wondered if it was possible for the U.S. political establishment to understand that the democracy goal in Iraq was not achievable this year.

14. (C) Speaking to Congressman Issa on April 13, Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak wondered where the U.S. could find an Iraqi "Adenauer" who could to address Iraq's many problems. Sheikh Mohammed added that restoring law and order has to take precedence over issues like a constitution or democracy. The U.S. also had to keep aggressive neighbors like Iran out of Iraqi affairs, the Foreign Minister added.

15. (C) The King and Foreign Minister both said on April 13 that regional states should take a greater role in Iraq. The King said it is unfortunate U.S. troops are patrolling cities. This is a job better left to Iraqi security or even Arab forces while American units secure the borders. The Arab League should be brought into play. Speaking separately, the Foreign Minister said that the U.S. should secure an agreement in principle from the Arab League so that "select" Arab states could send forces to help the Coalition. (Sheikh Mohammed specifically cited the UAE, Jordan and Bahrain.) The Foreign Minister said that last year the U.S. rejected such an idea. He suggested the time has come to revisit that decision.

16. (C) King Hamed also urged that the U.S. try harder with Sunni tribes in western Iraq. He recalled that historically tribal leaders could be paid to guarantee security across large expanses of territory. He recommended the U.S. focus more intently on building ties to tribal leaders; the Jordanians could help a great deal in this, he added. Hamed also cautioned against letting religious figures, especially among the Shia clerical establishment, get too involved in Iraqi political affairs.

17. (C) Hamed expressed confidence the U.S. ultimately would prevail; he was not especially alarmed by the recent spike in fighting. He was more interested on April 13 in giving advice about how to make the Iraq campaign easier. Nonetheless, all three officials underlined the primacy of restoring stability in Iraq, while dismissing the chances of democracy, more clearly than we have ever heard them do before.

FORD